

# CHARLES S. PEIRCE'S 'AFFECTIVE' REALISM

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## Introduction

«One of the essential characteristics of modern thought is not so much a determinate method, but rather the enormous fact that, for the first time in the history of philosophy, the very question of method has been placed at the center of inquiry»<sup>1</sup>. This statement of Max Scheler aptly describes Peirce's attitude toward the problem of knowledge.

As Peirce wrote in his famous article of 1877, *The Fixation of Belief*, inquiry represents an attempt to find a *method* for an adequate fixation of belief. The word «fixation» in this context does not so much refer to a particular state of mind, but rather to the broader idea of a personal and social fulfillment. From this point of view, truth and falsity are not *a priori* categories of reason, but predicates of its being or not capable to perform successful actions. «Truth [...] is distinguished from falsehood simply by this, that if acted on it will carry us to the point we aim at and not astray»<sup>2</sup>. At the beginning of inquiry there is not an abstract and detached desire of knowledge, but an urge to reach a stable position in the world, a desire to possess our life and address it towards the achievement of our aims.

As is well known, Peirce describes four paradigmatic methods for the fixation of belief, the last of which – the «method of science» – is regarded, on the basis of experiential evidence, as the most successful one<sup>3</sup>. The method of science, however, is not just a particular method among the others; it essentially embodies the very general idea of method. Peirce writes:

With the scientific method [...] I may start with known and observed facts to proceed to the unknown; and yet the rules which I follow in doing so may not be such as investigation would approve. The test of whether I am truly following the method is not an immediate appeal to my feelings and purposes, but, on the contrary, itself involves the application of the method. Hence it is that bad reasoning as well as good reasoning is possible; and this fact is the foundation of the practical side of logic<sup>4</sup>.

As C. Sini explains, the method of science provides the criterion of its own verification<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, it requires the previous determination of its formal procedure, which is the task of the logician to study and improve. Accordingly, Peirce concludes in 1882: «It is impossible to maintain that the superiority of the science of the moderns over that of the ancients is due to anything but a better *logic*»<sup>6</sup>. And logic is precisely «the *art of devising methods of research*, — the *method of methods*»<sup>7</sup>.

The method of science, which Peirce recognizes as the sole reliable method for an adequate fixation of belief, sets out from a fundamental

<sup>1</sup> M. Scheler, *Die transzendente und die psychologische Methode. Eine grundsätzliche Erörterung zur philosophischen Methodik*, Meiner, Leipzig, 1922, (Habilitationsschrift, Jena, 1900), (my translation).

<sup>2</sup> EP1: 123, 1877.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. T. L. Short, *Peirce on the Aim of Inquiry: Another Reading of «Fixation»*, «Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society», 36/1, 2000, pp. 1-4.

<sup>4</sup> EP1: 121, 1877.

<sup>5</sup> C. Sini, *Il pragmatismo americano*, Laterza, Bari, 1972, p. 193.

<sup>6</sup> EP1: 211, 1882.

<sup>7</sup> EP1: 210, 1882.

hypothesis, namely, the idea that the object of inquiry is something «whose characters are entirely independent of our opinions about them [...] The new conception here involved is that of reality»<sup>8</sup>. Inquiry, then, consists in the progressive and contextual verification of this general hypothesis – a verification developing in the three-stage inferential process of abduction, deduction and induction.

As Peirce writes in 1867, however, «When we say that the real is that which is independent of how you or I or any number of men think about it, we have still left the conception of independent being to be analyzed»<sup>9</sup>. What does it mean that reality is «independent» of our opinions about it? Without answering this question, we risk conceiving the subject and object of inquiry as being separated by an insurmountable gap, thus preventing at the outset the very possibility of knowledge.

## 1. Critique of Positivism

Peirce was aware of the danger of this subject-object dualism, as we can read in a manuscript he wrote in the winter between 1867 and 1868, *Critique of Positivism*. The positivist maintains «that we can have no knowledge of any reality except single impressions of sense and their sensible relations»<sup>10</sup> and that «no theory shall be admitted except in so far as it asserts or denies something with respect to a possible observation»<sup>11</sup>. The assumption implied in the positivistic position is that «if a theory concludes more than possible observations, it cannot be verified by direct observation and therefore is wholly baseless and metaphysical»<sup>12</sup>. Anything we say, if it claims to have any scientific value, needs to be capable of verification by direct observation.

At first sight, nothing could be logically sounder than the above principle and pragmatism might be understood as a simple and straightforward promotion of it. Peirce, however, notes that any theory whatever necessarily concludes more than can possibly be verified by direct observation:

Theories [...] are inferences of the unobserved from the observed – from the *present* in experience to the *future* in experience [...] so that we either reason to conclusions which are absolutely unobservable or from facts which are absolutely unobservable<sup>13</sup>.

Every inductive prediction is a belief whose object is not directly observable at the moment in which the inference is drawn; successively, when we verify the truth or falsity of that prediction by observing the course of experience, we draw our conclusion on the basis of a premise (the ground of the past prediction) that is no more *directly* observable, because it is either a record of the past or, more often, the testimony of another. As for abductive (hypothetical) inference, this fact is even more evident, as Peirce explains in 1878: «Hypothesis supposes something of a different kind from what we have directly observed,

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<sup>8</sup> EP1: 120, 1877.

<sup>9</sup> W2: 104, 1867.

<sup>10</sup> W2: 127, 1867-68.

<sup>11</sup> W2: 126, 1867-68.

<sup>12</sup> W2: 129, 1867-68.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

and frequently something which it would be impossible for us to observe directly»<sup>14</sup>.

The cornerstone of the positivistic attitude lies in the radical separation between the process of inquiry and its object, reality: the latter being independent, we can know only its 'observable side'. By drawing this conclusion, however, the positivist does not realize that knowledge is essentially an inferential process. In a text of 1872, *On Reality*, Peirce writes that while «the only thing of which we can have *direct experience* is sensation», «the *recognition* of a sensation as such is a matter of inferences»<sup>15</sup>. Accordingly, Peirce concludes, «the intellectual value of ideas lies evidently in their relations to one another in judgments and not in their qualities in themselves»<sup>16</sup>.

The positivistic ideal of method, pretending to 'save' reality from the influence of subjective inclinations, *de facto* reduces its consistency to alleged «impressions of sense»<sup>17</sup>, relegating any other consideration to the cloudy reflections of a discarded metaphysics. In this way the positivists, having separated reality from the broader context of sense to which it belongs, can treat it with «any arbitrary rule of reasoning they please»<sup>18</sup>. Under the slogan 'objectivism', reality is once again forced to conform to a series of arbitrary prejudices.

The key-error of the positivistic position, according to Peirce, is that of taking the notion of «independence», when referred to reality, as a synonym of «incognizability». The denial of the «incognizable», as well known, is a cornerstone of Peirce's theory of inquiry:

What idea can be attached to that of which there is no idea? For if there be an idea of such a reality, it is the object of that idea of which we are speaking, and which is not independent of thought. It is clear that it is quite beyond the power of the mind to have an idea of something entirely independent of thought<sup>19</sup>.

The idea of something that, while being *entirely* independent of thought (incognizable), is still *thought* in such an idea, is an evident contradiction, and requires no much discussion. Either the «incognizable» is the content of an idea, and then it is not absolutely incognizable, or it is not the content of an idea, and in this case, indeed, we do not have any idea of it. In *Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man*, Peirce explains:

All our conceptions are obtained by abstractions and combinations of cognitions first occurring in judgments of experience. Accordingly, there can be no conception of the absolutely incognizable, since nothing of that sort occurs in experience. [...] The highest conception which can be reached by abstractions from judgments of experience – and

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<sup>14</sup> EP1: 197, 1878.

<sup>15</sup> W3: 52, 1872 (emphasis added).

<sup>16</sup> W3: 107, 1873. Rossella Fabbrichesi explains: «Le relazioni tra gli enti sono significative per un Interpretante in vista di qualche scopo pratico» (R. Fabbrichesi, *Sulle tracce del segno. Semiotica, faneroscopia e fenomenologia nel pensiero di Charles S. Peirce*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze, 1986, p. 98).

<sup>17</sup> «Few things are more completely hidden from my observation than those hypothetical elements of thought which the psychologist finds reason to pronounce "immediate", in his sense. But the starting point of all our reasoning is not in those sense-impressions, but in our percepts [...]. It [the percept] is not inside our skulls, either, but out in the open. It is the external world that we directly observe» (EP2: 62, 1901).

<sup>18</sup> W3: 129, 1867-68.

<sup>19</sup> W3: 31-32, 1872.

therefore, the highest concept which can be reached at all – is the concept of something of the nature of a cognition<sup>20</sup>.

It could naturally be objected, however, that from the fact that it is quite «beyond the power of the mind» to conceive an incognizable thing, it does not follow that nothing incognizable can possibly exist. We should not take our *incapacity* of conceiving a thing as *impossibility* for that thing to exist. Even if we have no reason to affirm the existence of such a reality, we cannot deny the possibility of it. At the very least, the hypothesis of its existence should be admitted for the purpose of inquiry. As C. De Waal clearly explains, however, this objection betrays a radical misunderstanding:

If the term «incognizable» means anything, Peirce argues, it means «other than cognizable». Now, the conception of «other than» can only arise: «by abstraction, from the various particular cognized others; consequently *other* must mean with us *cognizable other*» [W2: 190, 1868]. Hence that which is differentiated from the cognizable when we say «other than cognizable», must, since this «other» can only be a *cognizable* other, be itself something cognizable. At the same time, however, the concept «incognizable» is meant to deny [that] that which is thus differentiated from the cognizable is itself cognizable. This makes the very concept «incognizable» self-contradictory<sup>21</sup>.

To be clear, Peirce does not mean to restrain reality within the boundaries of a hermeneutic circle; on the other hand, he is convinced that, if there is anything real, it must be *possibly* cognizable:

Over against any cognition, there is an unknown but knowable reality; but over against all possible cognition, there is only the self-contradictory. In short, *cognizability* (in its widest sense) and *being* are not merely metaphysically the same, but are synonymous terms<sup>22</sup>.

The difficulty of recognizing the truth of this conclusion comes from a scarce understanding of the general relation between reason and being, method and object of inquiry. When such a relation is not thoroughly comprehended, the dualism affecting the positivistic ideal of knowledge becomes unavoidable; it is that dualism that prevents us from grasping the «widest sense» of the notion of «cognizability».

## 2. Nominalism vs. Realism

In *Some Consequences of Four Incapacities*, Peirce writes this apparently contradictory statement: «There is no thing which is in-itself in the sense of not being relative to the mind, though things which are relative to the mind doubtless are, apart from that relation»<sup>23</sup>. How can things be *relative* to the mind and, at the same time, *apart* from that very relation?

The problem is thoroughly discussed in the famous review of Fraser's edition of the works of Berkeley<sup>24</sup>, in which Peirce enters the historical debate between realism and nominalism. As well known, the focus of the discussion is the attempt to answer the question: are universals real? In Peirce's view,

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<sup>20</sup> EP1: 24-25, 1868.

<sup>21</sup> C. De Waal, *The Real Issue Between Nominalism and Realism, Peirce and Berkeley Reconsidered*, «Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society», 32/3, 1996, pp. 435-6.

<sup>22</sup> EP1: 25, 1868.

<sup>23</sup> EP1: 52, 1868.

<sup>24</sup> Fraser's *The Works of George Berkeley* (EP1: 83-105, 1871).

however, the problem amounts to the more general one: is there any real continuity between mind and reality, so that our universal ideas, like «man» or «horse», can be regarded as representing something «which all men, or all horses, really have in common, independent of our thought?»<sup>25</sup> Are our general ideas bad copies of real things, or do they represent things themselves? The response to this question, according to Peirce, depends on the conception of reality we decide to endorse:

The real is that which is not whatever we happen to think it, but is unaffected by what we may think of it. [...] There are two widely separated points of view, from which *reality*, as just defined, may be regarded. Where is the real, the thing independent of how we think it, to be found?<sup>26</sup>

The question can also be restated as follows: is reality the efficient or final cause of thought? As Peirce writes in another text, «Reality must be connected with this chain of reasoning at one or other extremity. According as we place it at one or the other, we have realism or nominalism»<sup>27</sup>.

The nominalist places reality at the beginning of the process of knowledge or, more precisely, immediately before the beginning, as the efficient cause of our sensations. According to this view, Peirce explains, our general ideas are ‘mere generalizations’, that is, the unity they bring about does not have any correspondent reality:

While from this standpoint it may be admitted to be true as a rough statement that one man is like another [...] yet it can by no means be admitted that the two real men have really anything in common, for to say that they are both men is only to say that one mental term or thought-sign “man” stands indifferently for either of the sensible objects caused by the two external realities<sup>28</sup>.

The realist, on the contrary, places reality at the end of inquiry on the assumption that «human opinion universally tends in the long run to a definite form, which is the truth». This conception, Peirce writes, «if less familiar, is even more natural and obvious»<sup>29</sup>. In fact, he continues:

The realist will hold that the very same objects which are immediately present in our minds in experience really exist just as they are experienced out of the mind; that is, he will maintain a doctrine of immediate perception. He will not, therefore, sunder existence out of the mind and being in the mind as two wholly improportionable modes. When a thing is in such relation to the individual mind that that mind cognizes it, it is in the mind; and its being so in the mind will not in the least diminish its external existence. For he does not think of the mind as a receptacle, which if a thing is in, it ceases to be out of.<sup>30</sup>

The realist’s conception of reality offers a valid explanation of the question of universals: «any such natures [as “man” or “horse”] is to be regarded as something which is of itself neither universal nor singular, but is universal in the mind, singular in things out of the mind»<sup>31</sup>. In fact, if the mind is not a «receptacle» (a hermetic container of ideas), reality shall not be regarded as

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<sup>25</sup> EP1: 88, 1871.

<sup>26</sup> EP1: 88, 1871.

<sup>27</sup> W3: 55, 1872.

<sup>28</sup> EP1: 88, 1871.

<sup>29</sup> EP1: 88-89, 1871.

<sup>30</sup> EP1: 91, 1871.

<sup>31</sup> EP1: 93, 1871.

being *either* in *or* out of the mind, either universal or singular. Rather, the two poles of this alternative express «one and the same thing from two different points of view»<sup>32</sup>. A true representation is the presentation of reality itself. Finally, universal conceptions are capable of bringing experience's manifoldness into unity because this unity is already present, as singular, in things<sup>33</sup>.

### 3. Independence and Cognizability

I have expounded Peirce's rejection of positivism and his subsequent identification of being with cognizability. Moreover, I have accounted for Peirce's endorsement of scholastic realism against nominalism (the more general philosophical version of positivism) and his corresponding embracement of the doctrine of immediate perception («the immediate object of thought in a true judgment is the reality»<sup>34</sup>).

We can now draw the general conclusion that, for Peirce, not only do mind and reality not confront each other as two (in)different substances; on the contrary, they are to be reciprocally defined in their very essence. Reality is not something 'out there', that only in a second moment enters the semiotic process of interpretation; and the mind is not an isolate entity whose random opinions sometimes 'happen' to connect with reality. Every attempt to describe the dynamic of knowledge on the ground of this metaphysical dualism (thought and thing in itself, phenomena and noumenon) follows from a previous and unjustified fragmentation of our actual experience, in which mind and reality occur to be essentially correlated<sup>35</sup>. This is, in the last resort, the real concern of Peirce's rejection of nominalism:

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<sup>32</sup> EP1: 91, 1871. Accordingly, in his definition of «representationism» for the 1902 edition of the dictionary of James Baldwin, Peirce affirms that «representationists» and «presentationists» express «merely different points of view in which neither ought to find anything absolutely contrary to his own doctrine» (J. M. Baldwin, *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*, Macmillan, New York, 1902, p. 465).

<sup>33</sup> This conclusion is consistent with Peirce's semiotic conception of knowledge. Just before the long passage quoted above, in fact, Peirce explains: «This theory of reality is instantly fatal to the idea of a thing in itself,—a thing existing independent[ly] of all relation to the mind's conception of it. Yet it would by no means forbid, but rather encourage us, to regard the appearances of sense as only signs of the realities. Only, the realities which they represent would not be the unknowable cause of sensation, but *noumena*, or intelligible conceptions which are the last products of the mental action which is set in motion by sensation» (EP1: 90, 1871). The rejection of the «thing in itself» and the doctrine of immediate perception do not require us to abandon the semiotic structure of knowledge. Peirce's realism, unlike the «phenomenalism of Hume» (*Ibidem*), neither sunders reality from appearance nor reduces the former to the latter. The concept of sign, in fact, entails such a relationship between mind and reality as to both explain the fallibility of the former and preserve the independence of the latter. Accordingly, Carlo Sini observes: «L'eliminazione del concetto di intuizione e la riduzione di tutta la realtà a segno [...] trasforma il realismo dogmatico in realismo critico, la realtà statica che precede la ricerca nella realtà stessa della ricerca, sicché reale è propriamente il polo ideale verso cui la ricerca tende mossa dalla sua stessa necessità» (C. Sini, *Il pragmatismo americano*, Laterza, Bari, 1972, p. 182).

<sup>34</sup> EP1: 91, 1871.

<sup>35</sup> «L'errore consiste nel considerare il processo della conoscenza come un universo concluso e a sé stante rispetto ad altri universi, o più in generale rispetto all'universo della realtà che starebbe 'fuori' dal conoscere» (C. Sini, *Il pragmatismo americano*, Laterza, Bari, 1972, p. 147).

The nominalist, by isolating his reality so entirely from mental influence as he has done, has made it something which the mind cannot conceive; he has created the so often talked of «improportion between the mind and the thing in itself»<sup>36</sup>.

Scholars have often felt the need to ‘reconcile’ the foregoing conclusion with Peirce’s strong and ongoing emphasis on reality’s independent and irreducible character: how can Peirce conceive of reality as the final upshot of inquiry, entirely immanent to the latter’s development and, at the same time, affirm its independence of the mind’s opinions<sup>37</sup>? Without trying to give an exhaustive answer to this difficult question, I will only briefly explain why Peirce did *not* eschew this so-called ambiguous conception of reality.

If the independence of reality can be understood only in the context of a broader interdependence (or correlation) between mind and being, how is this correlation to be conceived? If, as we have seen, «independent» does not and cannot mean «incognizable», what other sense could be attached to it?

In *How to make clear our ideas* Peirce clarifies the notion of reality through his three different grades of clearness. In the first grade, *familiarity*, the idea of reality is the simplest notion of our daily life: «Taking clearness in the sense of familiarity, no idea could be clearer than this. Every child uses it with perfect confidence, never dreaming that he does not understand it»<sup>38</sup>. The notion of independence shows up in the second grade of clearness, *abstract definition*: «We may define the real as that whose characters are independent of what anybody may think of them to be»<sup>39</sup>. What does it mean for a thing to be independent of what the mind thinks about it? To answer this question we have to grasp reality’s third grade of clearness, which consists in the application of the *pragmatic maxim*<sup>40</sup>. Peirce writes:

Reality, like every other quality, consists in the peculiar sensible effects which things partaking of it produce. The only effect which real things have is to cause belief, for all the sensations which they excite emerge into consciousness in the form of beliefs<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> EP1: 100, 1871.

<sup>37</sup> I refer here to the everlasting debate about whether Peirce’s realism should be considered a form of foundationalism, weak foundationalism, non-foundationalism, anti-foundationalism, etc. See especially Delaney 1973 and 1976, Haack 1996, Short 2000 (2), and Forest 2007. Despite these scholars’ great insights, Peirce’s general conception of reality and its relation with the process of inquiry still represent unsettled questions for Peircean scholarship.

<sup>38</sup> EP1: 136, 1878. The reference to the child is more significant than it seems. In 1868, in fact, Peirce had written: «What do we mean by the real? It is a conception which we must first have had when we discovered that there was an unreal, an illusion; that is, when we first corrected ourselves. [...] The real, then, is that which, sooner or later, information and reasoning would finally result in, and which is therefore independent of the vagaries of me and you. Thus, the very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of a COMMUNITY, without definite limits, and capable of an indefinite increase of knowledge» (EP1: 52, 1868).

<sup>39</sup> EP1: 137, 1878. Peirce points out that independence of *what* we think does not involve independence of *how* we think: «That whose characters are independent of how you or I think is an external reality» (EP1: 136), but reality in its broadest sense is simply independent of *what* we think it to be – while it can be dependent of *how* we think, as the reality of a dream.

<sup>40</sup> «Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole conception of the object» (EP1: 132, 1878).

<sup>41</sup> EP1: 137, 1878.

As simple as this conclusion may appear, it actually contains the solution of the puzzle: while whatever *is* (being in general) shall be cognizable, the meaning of reality (which is a particular kind of being) consists in the effectuation of its own cognizability. Accordingly, «independent» does not mean *separate from inquiry* but, on the contrary, *essentially capable of engendering the fixation of belief*; and the latter, as we have seen, is the very purpose of inquiry. In other words, reality is independent inasmuch as it presents itself to our eyes as such, namely, as something that we cannot arbitrarily modify and upon which, therefore, we are somehow compelled to conform our opinions. As a matter of experience, in fact, the more an object is capable of *attracting* the belief, the more it will be perceived as *independent* of the mind's arbitrary opinions. But nothing more than reality is capable of attracting us and provoking our interest, as children's more frequent questions («Is this real?», «Is that true?», etc.) attest.

Finally, human opinions tend in the long run toward a *definite* result because reality itself guides them toward their adequate *fixation*. At the same time, however, reality has no other meaning than the production of this very fixation and, in this sense, it is a purely *functional* concept, as well as one whose content can never be given a priori but can only be progressively revealed by the process of inquiry.

Here then we are left with an open field of investigation: the study of the different ways in which reality, as the permanent and functional limit of inquiry, directs our beliefs toward their adequate fixation (the study of the different *modalities* in which reality progressively affects, shapes, and configures our experience). Toward the end of his life, Peirce was unceasingly working on this project (a sign of the fact that his 'metaphysical' interest in the question of reality had never left his mind). In accordance with his system of categories, he was trying to describe reality in terms of possibility, actuality, and generality. I have no space to give an account of Peirce's mature conception of reality. However, as a conclusion of our investigation, I can at least point to a few places of Peirce's logic of inquiry that contain the germs of that conception.

## Conclusion

As the foregoing analysis has begun to show, when asked to give an account of Peirce's logic of inquiry, we face the following threefold notion of reality: (1) at the *beginning* of inquiry, as the fundamental hypothesis of the method of science; (2) during the *course* of inquiry, as the 'external' object of the mind's work of symbolization; (3) at the *end* of inquiry, as the ultimate ideal of the infinite community of inquirers.

1. Reality *affects*<sup>42</sup> our beliefs in the form of a highly plausible hypothesis that, while having no a priori justification, still imposes itself to the mind as a most natural – though extremely vague – conception<sup>43</sup>. We always remain free to disregard it (as shown by the many historical cases of inquiries conducted

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<sup>42</sup> «In using this causal word, "affect", I do not refer to invariable accompaniment or sequence, merely, or necessarily. What I mean is that when there is a sign there will be an interpretant in another sign. The essence of the relation is the conditional futurity...» (CP 8.225, 1904).

<sup>43</sup> In this respect, Rossella Fabbrichesi observes: «La conoscenza ha come fondamento un nocciolo duro di credenze indiscutibili che sfuggono al 'tribunale critico della ragione' e privati delle quali non potremmo procedere neppure di un passo nell'indagine logica e scientifica» (R. Fabbrichesi, *Del certo e del vago: l'analisi del senso comune in Peirce e in Wittgenstein*, in *Semiotica ed ermeneutica. Quaderni di Acme*, n. 60, C. Sini (editor), Monduzzi, Bologna, 2003, p. 33).



with the method of tenacity, authority, and a priory method), but its insistence eventually ceases to prevail when we are affected by authentic doubts. In this form, reality represents a pure possibility, though one which has the power to work itself out in the world.

2. Once we assume the hypothesis of reality as a general guide of inquiry, we find our strain of thoughts constantly sustained-constrained by some external pressure (described in Peirce's phenomenology as the experience of *Secondness*). From a semiotic standpoint, such external pressure is involved in the indexical character of our thought. An index is a sign which «signifies its object solely by virtue of being really connected with it»<sup>44</sup> and, therefore, denotes it «by forcing it upon the attention»<sup>45</sup>. For example, in the proposition «this thing is red», the word «this» does not perform the function of a blank to be filled by general predicates; instead, it indicates the emergence in our experience of a new element that, as soon as it enters the field of consciousness, calls for a more complete revelation in a system of language. This very intrusion, however, is not something of which we can take credit: it happens. It is true that *I* decide to direct my attention toward a certain object in order to indicate it, but this indexical reference, more than a purely spontaneous action, is rather the upshot of an affective process: I can direct my attention toward a certain object because that object is already attracting me. I do not create the object by turning on it; I answer to its call<sup>46</sup>. Hence, the 'active' process of predication of experience has to be constantly preceded and accompanied by a 'passive' movement of presentation of that very experience.

3. Finally, as inquiry advances, the constraining pressure of existence stimulates the self-controlled formation of habits of action toward always-greater governance of the unpredictable (surprising) elements of experience. It turns out, however, that the agent cannot criticize (and thus modify) his own habits except by comparing action with an ultimate esthetic ideal, however slightly perceived. Accordingly Peirce concludes: «it is by the indefinite replication of self-control upon self-control that the *vir* is begotten, and by action, through thought, he grows an esthetic ideal»<sup>47</sup>. Here, then, we find the richest meaning of Peirce's conception of reality: only ideals, in the last resort, are capable of *fully* magnetizing the agent's beliefs and bring them to adequate fixation. The attractive power of ultimate (*esthetic*) ideals, according to Peirce, is the last, unsurpassable anchor of objectivity.

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<sup>44</sup> EP1: 226, 1885.

<sup>45</sup> CP 3.434, 1896.

<sup>46</sup> «Ogni rappresentazione è la risposta a un suggerimento che arriva dalla realtà. [...] L'unità del giudizio non dipende dal "Ich denke" come sosteneva Kant ma dalla risposta a una domanda che la realtà sempre ci pone, una domanda espressa nel più comune dei modi: [...] "Don't you think so?"» (G. Maddalena, *Metafisica per assurdo. Peirce e i problemi dell'epistemologia contemporanea*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2009, p. 132).

<sup>47</sup> CP 5.402, n. 3, 1906.